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A LETTER
TO THE
CONGREGATION OF S. PAUL'S,
DUNDEE.

OXFORD, *Nov.* 5, 1859.

BRETHREN BELOVED IN THE LORD,

The approaching completion of the period of twelve years in the history of our pastoral relations makes it not unsuitable that I should address a few words to you concerning it. A connection of twelve years implies no small fraction of human life; and many events most intimately affecting all of us have during the lapse of that period occurred. How many during that time have been summoned from this earthly scene to render an account of every thought, word, and deed, to their God and Judge! How many new members have been aggregated into the Church! What varied changes must have passed over the spiritual conditions of most of us—advances, retrogressions, recoveries, periods of sloth, periods of increasing strength under the disciplining hand of God, times of inward joy, hours bordering upon despair, drynesses, desolations, and again the abiding sense of God's mercy! Who shall number the graces which God from time to time has bestowed upon us? His corrections, His encouragements, His warnings, His interferences, the holy visitations of His Spirit, the mighty working of His Sacraments, the rich abundance of the manifestations of his blessed Presence, in so many ways bestowed upon us? How have we treated these? Is ours to be an account of correspondence with grace, or of its deliberate rejection, or its neglect? Have we by that grace continued in that state of salvation unto which we have been called, or have we forfeited it? And, if so, have we by the same grace recovered it through lowly and earnest repentance? Are we that for which God in His eternal purpose of love created us, or have we lost our vocation? Have we, in short, fulfilled the mighty purpose which God has had for each of us, one by one; or have we neglected that which we were called upon to do?

In looking back upon the past, so far as externals go, we have much to be thankful for. Twelve years ago, one small chapel sufficed for the Episcopalians of Dundee. Now we not only occupy the beautiful church which God of His great mercy has permitted us to raise to His honour, but the flourishing congregations of S. Mary's, Broughty Ferry, S. Mary Magdalene's, Blinshall Street, and S. Salvador's,

Maxwelltown, with our ample supply of Day Schools and Night Schools, attest the increase of the Church. The Orphanage, and other institutions connected with her, give evidence of the charity and benevolence of many of her members. It is true that much still remains for us to do; nevertheless, we should be thankless to God if we did not in all gratitude acknowledge that hitherto God hath helped us.

The same thing holds good with regard to the interior life. I believe that many during the last twelve years have made an excellent use of the means of grace placed within their reach, and that the greater part of the congregation are really desiring to do the will of God in a humble, practical, and unostentatious way. I believe that there is a real religiousness amongst many; and that, especially in the duties of charity and mercy, much is being done amongst us. Still, I would wish that there were even more of this. Devout as, God be thanked, our communicants are, would that there were more who regarded the Communion as the centre of their spiritual life, the special means of habitual communion with their God and Saviour. Would that they who now content themselves with one attendance on the Sunday, felt more their need of their Redeemer, and morning and evening sought Him, without whom we can do nothing, in His House of Prayer, where He has promised to be found. Would that those who have, or can make, leisure, profited more habitually by the daily opportunities of public worship. Would that the blessedness of almsgiving were yet more felt, and that the happy provision for giving alms in secret which the poor man's box, now erected in the church, affords you, were more employed by all of you. Yea, would, altogether, that we all were more awakened to the blessedness of union with our dear Redeemer in His Mystical Body, the communion of Saints. We must bear in mind the great law of Christian responsibility, that to whom much has been entrusted, of him much will be required. Our concern is, not only what we have done, or forborne from doing, but what we have done, or left undone *under the circumstances in which God has placed us.*

And now, brethren, as I have always desired to act with the most perfect candour towards you, to whom I am bound by the strongest bonds both of duty and of love, I would wish to re-assure any of you, if the heavy charge of depraving the Formularies and teaching of the Church, which a Presbyter has thought right to bring against me, should have perplexed and disquieted you, as I have no doubt they have distressed you. It is, indeed (so far as my memory serves me), an

unprecedented, as, I am sure, it is an unnatural relation of a clergyman to his Bishop. Of his act, however, I will now say nothing. To our own Master each of us must stand or fall. If he has acted wrongly—as I believe he has acted wrongly—I pray God not to remember it against him. But since he has impugned my teaching on various solemn points, in the Presentment, which has been doubtless circulated among you, I would just recal to you sayings of some of the Divines ever held in repute in the Church, as strong as any which I have expressed. Since they have never been thought to have depraved the teaching of the Church, so you will believe neither ought this grave charge to be imputed to me.

Is anything that I have written in the Charge more fervid than these words of the holy Bishop Ken?

“I believe Thy Body and Blood TO BE AS REALLY PRESENT IN THE HOLY SACRAMENT AS THY DIVINE POWER CAN MAKE IT, though the manner of Thy Mysterious Presence I cannot comprehend.”—*Ken's Manual of Prayers*, p. 72. *Ed.* 1840.

Have I, on the subject of the Sacrifice, used any expression so strong as those of Bishop Wilson?

“MAY I ATONE THEE, O GOD, BY OFFERING TO THEE THE PURE AND UNBLOODY SACRIFICE, which Thou hast ordained by Jesus Christ. Amen.”—*Sacra Privata. Complete Ed.* 1853, p. 105.

Again,—

“Give me such holy dispositions of mind whenever I approach Thine altar, as may in some measure be proportionable to the holiness of the work I am about, of presenting the prayers of the faithful, of offering a spiritual Sacrifice to God, in order to convey the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ—the True Bread of Life—to all His members. Give me, when I commemorate the SAME SACRIFICE THAT JESUS CHRIST ONCE OFFERED, give me the same intentions He had, to SATISFY THE JUSTICE OF GOD, TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIS MERCIES, AND TO PAY ALL THAT DEBT which a creature owes to his Creator. None can do this effectually but Jesus Christ. HIM, THEREFORE, WE PRESENT TO GOD IN THIS HOLY SACRAMENT.”—*Sacra Privata*, p. 199.

With regard to the opinions I have stated concerning the relations of unworthy communicants to the Holy Mysteries, I have spoken far less positively than the holy man whose sayings I have just quoted:

“To offer the prayers of the faithful to God with polluted lips, to BREAK THE BREAD OF LIFE WITH UNCLEAN HANDS, to RECEIVE THAT BREAD INTO A SOUL DEFILED with unchaste thoughts,—how dreadfully provoking must it needs be!”—*Sacra Privata*, p. 205.

Again,—

“It being the greatest indignity to Christ and the Divine Ordinance, to PROSTITUTE THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST TO NOTORIOUS EVIL LIVERS.”—*Sacra Privata*, p. 227.

On the remaining point excepted against me, I cannot think that I have gone beyond the obvious sense of these words from that well-known Manual, Bishop Jeremy Taylor’s “Worthy Communicant”:—

“Place thyself upon thy kness, in the humblest and the devoutest posture of worshippers, and think not much IN THE LOWEST MANNER TO WORSHIP THE KING OF MEN AND ANGELS, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, the great Lover of souls, the Saviour of the body; Him whom all the angels of God worship; Him whom Thou confessest worthy of all, and whom all the world shall adore, and before whom they shall tremble at the Day of Judgment. For, IF CHRIST BE NOT THERE AFTER A PECULIAR MANNER, WHOM, OR WHOSE BODY, DO WE RECEIVE? BUT IF HE BE PRESENT TO US, NOT IN MYSTERY ONLY, BUT IN BLESSING ALSO, WHY DO WE NOT WORSHIP? But all the Christians always did so from time immemorial. ‘No man eats this Flesh, unless he first adores,’ said S. Austin. ‘For the wise men, and the barbarians, did worship this Body in the manger with very much fear and reverence: let us, therefore, who are citizens of Heaven, at least not fall short of the barbarians. But thou seest Him not in the manger, but on the altar; and thou beholdest Him not in the Virgin’s arms, but represented by the Priest, and brought to thee in sacrifice by the Holy Spirit of God.’ So S. Chrysostom argues.”—*Jeremy Taylor’s Works*, vol. xv., p. 671. *Ed. Heber.*

Since these books have for so many years been the comfort and edification of succeeding generations of English and Scottish Churchmen, I doubt not that what I have taught will, rightly understood, commend itself to all those who have, by God’s help, formed their devotional characters upon these excellent models. As regards the delated Charge, beyond the duty to truth which its publication recognised and sought to fulfil, I had, in a great degree, the union of Christians in my

mind when I wrote it. I believed that I was stating things in a way which might tone down the acerbities of polemics, and induce men to look upon the most mysterious and blessed doctrine of the Holy Eucharist in a devotional and uncontroversial way. You may judge of my disappointment and pain when I found it the occasion of a devastating strife on these solemn subjects.

Much, however, as I have deplored the loss of Christian love, which is, I fear, almost inseparable from controversy, I think that the late agitation has been no unmitigated evil. Our good Father brings good out of all evil, and truth suffers yet more from being neglected than from being controverted. I shall be very much disappointed if the result of all this discussion be not a much higher standard of faith on these supernatural verities. The individual may suffer; words or phrases which have been misunderstood will find their real signification. The cause of truth will triumph; and therefore I am persuaded that the consequence of these dissensions will be a deeper appreciation of the high mercy of God, who has "given to us His only Son, not only to die for us, but also TO BE OUR SPIRITUAL FOOD AND SUSTENANCE IN the Holy Sacrament."

I need not assure you, my dear Brethren, of my unshaken adherence to the documents and standards of the Church; of my repudiation of all the errors and false teaching which the Church repudiates; and of my desire for the peace of our Communion, and for the abatement of these troubles.

You yourselves can bear witness, that even the points charged against me, on which I individually feel so strongly, I have never pressed upon you as truths necessary to salvation, I have never made their acceptance or non-acceptance a term of Communion among you; and while I have never failed, at the fit time and place, to give an account of the faith that was in me, I have seldom in the pulpit directed your thoughts to these abstract and theological points, but rather to the practical aspect of faith as it worketh by love, and to that charity springing from a pure heart, which the Apostle calls "the end of the commandment."

All consolation must come from Him, whom in this, as in other offices of my ministration, I have desired to serve: But among the external consolations which have supported me, I should be most ungrateful did I not express my warm acknowledgments of the conduct of the Congregation of St. Paul's. I cannot give too much praise to the calm, thoughtful, and considerate attitude which they have assumed in this matter.

With some few exceptions, as I understand—for I have thought it best not to inquire too curiously into any one's secret opinion—I have found that they have conducted themselves under the very trying circumstances with Christian prudence and moderation. They have trusted their Pastor till he should be found untrustworthy; and exhibited to the world the spectacle of a large religious body bent upon doing right, and unswayed by passion or religious excitement—convinced that it is not by the intellect alone, but by the exercise of the holy affections, that men obtain light as to Divine truth—and trusting all things unreservedly to His will, who maketh all things work together for good to them that love Him.

Yet He, who is always more ready to hear than we to pray, deigns to desire our prayers for the fulfilment of His good designs towards us. I therefore earnestly crave the benefit of your good prayers, that it may please Him, of His great mercy, so to overrule these present sorrows, that the Church may again give Him thanks for “blessing her children within her,” for “making peace in her borders, and filling her with the flour of wheat.”

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all, evermore. Amen. So prays your affectionate Friend and Pastor,

ALEXANDER, *Bishop of Brechin.*

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